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THE COVENANT AND THE EARLY PROPHETS.

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[Translated by Professor George H. Schodde, from *Gesetz und Propheten*, pp. 21-30. Erlangen, 1881.]

As the criticism of Baur and his school traced back the distinguishing peculiarities of the Christian religion rather to Paul than to Christ, so the latest critical school reduces the importance of the founder of the Old Testament religion to such small dimensions that the later prophets of the Northern Kingdom appear to be the real protagonists of its fundamental and essential ideas. While Wellhausen as yet has said scarcely anything of the importance of Moses; this, according to Kuenen, consists in the fact that he created a firm connection between Jehovah and the people whom he had led out of Egypt. His importance is represented to consist, not in anything that he fixed for the public worship of God or the political organization of the people, but in this that he firmly established the worship of the God of the fathers, whose new name was revealed to Moses—"I will be your God and ye shall be my people"—to have brought this to the full consciousness of his people is the sum and substance of Moses's life work. And this consciousness was not again lost to the people; on the other hand, his people were not able to understand anything else, especially not the ethical conception of God. "In one word," he says (*De Godsdienst van Israel*, I. p. 291), "that which distinguished Moses from his people remained his own personal possession and that of a few other spiritual associates—under the influence of Moses, Israel took one step forward, but it was only *one* step." Wellhausen, with correct judgment, sees that if the idea of an historical covenant established with the people once for all time under Moses, with certain conditions, is of great antiquity and universal, then his historical structure has lost its foundation. He accordingly denies that the older prophets had any knowledge of a covenant relation entered into by Jehovah with his people. In this way we are led to a discussion of the idea of ברית in its importance for the prophetic literature. We must decide whether the older prophets already acknowledge the Mosaic covenant as their basis or not, and what characteristics they ascribe to this covenant.

In reference to the etymon ברית we cannot agree with the explanation, which has also found an entrance into Gesenius's Lexicon, according to which, (derived from ברה = to cut, to separate) *decision, determination* is the meaning, and then only, in a derived sense, a decision established to regulate the relationship between persons. But rather the original meaning is not διαθήκη (in the original sense of the word = μονόπλευρος), but συνθήκη; i. e., ברית proceeds from a mutual relationship, as is shown from its frequent constructions with עם, את, בין. The conception διαθήκη, generally expressed by the construction with ל, originates in the fact that each covenant contains some individual stipulations. In addition to this comes the peculiar character of this covenant, according to which God, as the Higher Being, offers to and imposes upon men the duties without which no covenant is thinkable; accordingly, but little is said of the compliance of Jehovah, because he, on account of his fidelity, naturally does his duties, and in reality there is need of a reminder only on the part of the other party. Without doubt the expression כרת ברית, which can be compared with the parallel expressions ὁρκία τέμνειν and *foedus icere*, proves that the natural and oldest meaning of ברית is a covenant concluded with a sacrifice, as this original

signification can yet be traced in the word **ברית**, literally "cutting apart or into pieces," cf. Köhler, on Zech. ix., 11.

The idea of a covenant includes the idea that it constitutes a relationship of right which carries with it duties and rights of those entering upon this relationship. Jehovah binds himself to be to his people a faithful covenant God, and in return for this, demands obedience of the people, for which reason the prophets so frequently describe God in the act of passing judgment. Israel, on the other hand, has the right to expect the fulfilment of the divine promises, if it remains faithful to its covenant promises. It is a question whether the cultus element belonged to these covenant duties. As in general in olden times covenant and sacrifice were closely connected, thus, too, not only the expression **כרת ברית** and the etymon of **ברית**, but also Gen. xv. and more especially the account in Exod. xxiv., prove that this same connection was present to the Jewish mind also. Since the oldest account of the Mosaic covenant represents it as having been established through sacrifices, and since the Book of the Covenant itself contains sacrifice as an integral part, there can be no doubt that the Mosaic covenant is most closely connected with sacrifices. It is accordingly quite natural that Wellhausen should attempt to eliminate the idea of a covenant out of the oldest prophetic literature. But this is a combat against windmills. "The consciousness," says Kuenen, p. 290, "that a peculiar and new relationship existed between the God, in whose name Moses acted, and the tribes of Israel, did not again die out." This, indeed, is the case. All the prophets stood upon the condition of affairs established by Moses at Sinai; in the Blessing of Moses the chief duty of the priesthood is represented to be the preservation of the covenant of God with his people (Deut. xxxiii., 9); and the Blessing of Moses, like the Song of Deborah, (Judg. v.) begins with a reference to the manifestation of God on Mount Sinai. Wellhausen thinks that the narrative in Exod. xxiv., 3-8 had no influence on the older prophets. It is strange how little the latent character of the Book of the Covenant, to whose frame-work Exod. xxiv. belongs, troubles him here, although he considers a similar character of the Priest Codex as most improbable. But even supposing that the Book of the Covenant together with its historical frame-work and the Blessing of Moses were unknown to the older prophets, or had not been acknowledged by them, which is most improbable, do we not find the same idea in the oldest prophets? Although Amos may not have the exact words, yet the thing itself is there. When in iii., 1 he says, "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O Children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (the prophet here evidently thinks of Exod. xix., 5), it is certainly natural to conclude that Amos knows of a closer relationship between Jehovah and Israel, i. e., knows of a covenant, on account of the violation of which he recognizes the justice of the divine punishment. When Hosea compares the connection between Jehovah and his people to a marriage and then uses the picture for the thing itself, viii., 1; vi., 7, does he not know of a covenant? In viii., 1 the sum of Israel's guilt is concentrated in the transgression of the covenant. And when Jehovah, in Isaiah, is the king, or master, or Lord of the vineyard, then certainly these figures are only other expressions for the covenant relation; for the king loves and protects his people, the father his children, the master of the vineyard his vineyard, as long as they produce what he is justified in asking of them; and, in the opposite case, he

certainly dissolves his relationship to them and lays upon them punishment and judgment. The word was not the source of the idea, as Wellhausen maintains, but rather the idea finds expression in various but generically alike figures and pictures. Just in the universal potency of the idea of the covenant lies the truth of what Duhm says, when he remarks that Israel as a people is the object of the sermons of the older prophets, although he is wrong in denying the recognition of the individual. For the covenant is in the first instance a covenant of the people. In reality an impartial examination finds no difference between the older and the younger prophets in the conception of the covenant; as in general the stability of Old Testament ideas is much greater than is generally acknowledged. The remark of Guthe is indeed correct, that all the features of the sermons of Jeremiah unite and concentrate in the idea of a covenant, and that this idea appears more in this prophet than in any other. But his whole work as a preacher can be summed up in the **ברית** only for this reason that its importance is so central not only with "the authorities of Biblical Theology," but in the Old Testament religion itself; and in principle this is true also in the case of the older prophets. To conclude from the fact that Jeremiah never uses the word **ברית** metaphorically (as Job v., 23; Hos. ii., 20) and never otherwise than in a religious sense, that he was the first to restrict the idea of a covenant to the purely religious sphere, and consequently entertained an idea of a covenant peculiar to himself, is certainly most superficial. Why could he not have used a term so common as this, as is done in Zech. xi., 10, or Mal. ii., 14? Wellhausen commits the same blunder when he concludes from the covenant with the beasts in Hos. ii., 18 that Hosea had not the specific idea of a covenant. With such feeble arguments it will be impossible to argue away the fact that all the prophets stand upon the covenant founded by Moses. Or do these critics think that possibly the establishment of a covenant was not effected through Moses? It could possibly be considered somewhat surprising that the name of Moses is so seldom found in the older prophets. But why should that be said which all know? Is not the same true in the earliest records as found in Genesis? The *ex silentio* argument, which plays so important a role in modern criticism, often proves to be very mechanical. When in Amos iii., 1 sq. the special election of Israel for a peculiar relationship with God is brought into connection with the exodus out of Egypt, then certainly the exodus which took place under Moses is not the only ground for the duty of compliance, for a similar treatment had been accorded to Kush, Aram and Philistæa by Jehovah; he must know other fundamental facts besides these from the time of the beginning of the congregation, which, as a matter of course, transpired through the same mediator. And does Hosea (xii., 12 sq.) not set up Moses beside Jacob only as a prophet such as others. He says there, "And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved." The contrast here evidently is this, that while Ephraim boasts of Jacob and Bethel, it has forgotten him who is greater, through whom God had led them out of Egypt and protected them. As much higher as a prophet is than a serving shepherd, so much higher Moses stands than the poor Jacob serving for a wife. It has been thought by Ewald and others that this historical retrospect is to illustrate the miraculous divine preservation in dangers. But, in the case of Jacob, we hear nothing of a deliverance from danger; but the poor shepherd's life of Jacob is contrasted with the prophetic activity

of Moses. The former watched the sheep for a wife; the latter watched over the people. It is all the worse that Ephraim has provoked anger most bitterly, that he spoke trembling, exalted himself in Israel, and has continued this conduct up to now (XII., 15; XIII., 1, 2). It is easily seen how groundless it is to suppose that Hosea is only laying down the foundation ideas of Israel's religion. For him, Ephraim's sin is backsliding from the Mosaic past and **משמרת**. For this relationship lies clear to the view in his thought. The Mosaic times are the times of the first and youthful love (Hos. XI., 1); so entirely are the older prophets rooted to the covenant as founded by Moses. That Amos (v., 26) does not teach that Israel's religion was developed out of an originally Sabaic form of worship, as Vatke thinks, will soon be seen. Indeed, the whole manner of the prophets is such that they do not preach new doctrines. They do not endeavor to prove why people should comply with the religious and moral precepts; they rather presuppose that the sins of the people are transgressions against old and well-known truths; they live and have their being in the covenant relation, and accuse the people of unfaithfulness to this covenant. And the people are one with the prophets in this regard; every child in Israel knows that God, through Moses, had entered into a covenant relation with Israel. Smend, *Moses apud Prophetas*, p. 19, correctly remarks: "*Fœdus semel in Monte Sinai per Mosem junctum esse, traditione certissima atque unanimi antiquitus constabat.*" All the more the above stated question, whether the cultus element was included in the idea of a covenant, demands an answer. However closely covenant and sacrifice may have been connected in Israel, it would, nevertheless, have been possible for the prophets to have formed their own conception of the covenant. They would, of course, in doing so, have renewed their connection with the whole past, which considered the sacrifices as a portion of the Mosaic legislation, and, from the outstart, it is impossible that a prophet would have assumed a hostile attitude against the sacrificial system which was so closely interwoven with the history of the people. As Moses already, although, according to the covenant account of both Elohist and Jehovist sources (Ex. III. and VI.), the name Jehovah was first revealed to him, nevertheless came to his people in the name of the God of their fathers, thus too every true prophet must live in the spiritual world and history of his people; otherwise, his activity is without historic connection. It creates no favorable opinion of the consistency of the modern critics, that they cut away the activity of the prophets from the roots of the religious past. For, from the prophetic polemics against the sacrifices as practiced in those days, so much at least is incontestably clear, that Israel must have lived in the faith that such offerings were pleasing to God. The people entertain no other idea but that in the oldest times the piety of the fathers found expression in such sacrifices. From the first offerings of Cain and Abel, through the patriarchal age, the practice of sacrificing was kept up, either to secure or to retain the good pleasure of God. Above all, Moses himself, according to all accounts, received into the legislation and sanctioned the sacrificial system. In truth, it is difficult to understand how true prophets, whose activity, as it appears, was guided by the principle expressed in Matt. III., 15, could, in so radical a manner, have deserted the common basis of an understanding with the people. They would have proclaimed an entirely new and strange conception of a covenant to the people.

How closely the covenant idea was associated with sacrifices in the religious consciousness of the Israelites can be seen, not only from Zech. IX., 11, where the

return of those in exile is predicted on account of the blood of the covenant, where, consequently, the connection between sacrifice and covenant is presupposed as a fixed and accepted fact, but also from Ps. L. This psalm is of an entirely prophetic character, and, according to popular exegesis—which, however, we cannot accept—is claimed to oppose sacrifices most emphatically. All the more important is it that the psalmist gives us his theme in verse 6, “Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” Whether the participle כרתִי be taken in the sense of the past or present, the conclusion in each case follows that, in the eyes of the saints, the covenant was concluded and maintained only on the basis of sacrifices. כרתִי and זבח are, in the eyes of the “saints,” inseparable. The prophet, indeed, is not to join in with this view; but even conceding this, it is, nevertheless, certain that his contemporaries, and, indeed, the saints among them—for an ironical interpretation of חסידים is not to be thought of—unite covenant and sacrifice. At any rate this psalmist, like Jeremiah, who (vii., 21 sq.) is claimed to exclude sacrifices from among the duties of the covenant, could have been permitted to hold his own peculiar view. The *divide et impera* has so much become the practice of the newer Old Testament criticism, that this possibility must not be left out of sight. Especially is it Duhm who ascribes not only to the prophets, but also to each prophet individually, a peculiar system of doctrine over against the law; as though the prophets were to be regarded in the light of modern systematizing theologians. In this manner he sets up his dry categories which oppose each other, like skeleton beings, so that, instead of a living picture, only the broken bones of dry conceptions and theological statements lie on the ground, and the wonderful harmony of the whole activity of prophecy is destroyed. While, according to this view, Hosea still permits sacrifices, Amos knows only of an entirely wordless cultus. Wellhausen, indeed, does not deal with such follies, but seeks to give a complete historical picture. He is, indeed, thereby compelled to make even men like Hosea opponents of sacrifices. The whole prophetic literature as such, according to the views of Wellhausen and of other critics, is claimed to stand in an irreconcilable antagonism to sacrifices as a divine institution. According to this, then, the covenant with God would have been conceived by the prophets as without sacrifices. But as no prophet expressly restricts the idea of the covenant in this manner, we will be able to decide this question only in the later discussion. Here it will suffice to mention the conclusion we have reached: The oldest prophecy has its roots entirely in the covenant concluded by Moses, mentions it repeatedly; and, when this is not done by name, the thing itself is there. If they conceived the duties of the covenant to be merely of a moral nature (*sittlich*), then the prophets contradict the fundamental ideas of the traditional religion and the method practiced by the fathers to prove their piety.